

Warlocks with Class

By Skip Williams



This column aims to provide players with tips on creating effective and interesting characters of various types. So whether you're a beginning player creating your very first character or an experienced gamer looking to put some punch into an old standby, this column is for you!

The Pros and Cons of a Warlock

The warlock's dark heritage gives him a limited array of useful powers. Most warlocks carry at least a small taint of evil, but a few manage to rise above their ancestry to become great heroes. Sinister or valiant, a warlock offers plenty of challenges and rewards for any player.

Warlock Assets

The warlock has access to several powerful abilities that he can use over and over. Though he can't produce many magical effects, choosing the right ones creates a potent spellcaster who can hold his own in any adventuring party. Though he is a specialist in arcane combat, the warlock can also gain bonuses on a variety of skill checks and create numerous other useful magical effects. Below are several assets you have going for you when you choose a warlock.

- **Winning Ways:** A warlock needs to have a high Charisma score because that ability governs his spellcasting. But high Charisma also gives him an edge in negotiations.
- **Good Will Saves:** A warlock uses the best save progression in the game for Will saves (see Table 3-1 in the *Player's Handbook*). This natural mental strength helps him resist most effects that fool his mind or assault his spirit, including charms, compulsions, illusions, fear effects, and even *inflict* spells.
- **Eldritch Blast:** Starting at first level, a warlock gains the spell-like ability to release a magical ray that can damage creatures or objects. This *eldritch blast* affects only one target at a time, and it has a fairly short range, but the warlock can use it as a standard action as often as he likes.
- **Invocations:** An invocation is a spell-like ability that the warlock can use at will. At 1st level, and once every five levels thereafter, he can choose one invocation from a specific list. Some invocations alter the warlock's *eldritch blast*; others provide new abilities that expand his options beyond merely dealing damage.
- **Many Class Features:** A warlock's supernatural heredity grants him many useful abilities, including damage reduction, fast healing, energy resistance, and the ability to make and use magic items of all kinds.



- **Fair Weapon Selection:** The warlock is proficient only with simple weaponry. Though simple weapons aren't the most deadly ones available, the fact that the warlock has access to the whole category gives him more options than most other arcane spellcasters have. That versatility can be a lifesaver if his spells happen to fail him.
- **Fair Armor Selection:** The warlock is proficient with light armor, but not with shields. Light armor doesn't provide great protection, but it's better than what many arcane spellcasters have available.
- **Good Attack Bonus:** A warlock's base attack bonus -- +3 per four levels -- is second only to that of the more martial classes, such as the fighter. So if your warlock decides to enter combat, he can make a pretty good showing. He also has an excellent chance to hit most foes with his *eldritch blasts*, which are ranged touch attacks.

Warlock Weaknesses

Warlocks pay a heavy price for their powerful magic. Here are a few of the disadvantages you should keep in mind if you're considering a warlock character.

- **Fairly Low Hit Points:** The warlock's 6-sided Hit Dice give him a few more hit points than most arcane spellcasters have. Nevertheless, he is still quite vulnerable to damage.
- **Low Skill Points:** At a mere two skill points per level, most warlocks don't accumulate many skill ranks, even with quadruple skill points at 1st level.
- **Poor Reflex and Fortitude Saving Throws:** Warlocks have the worst progression for Fortitude and Reflex saves in the game (see Table 3-1 in the *Player's Handbook*). Thus, they aren't so great at avoiding attacks on their bodies.
- **Limited Magical Choices:** The warlock begins play with his *eldritch blast* ability and a single invocation. During his entire career, he can choose only three more invocations. He has a limited ability to change his repertoire, but for the most part, he is stuck with whatever spells he has chosen.

Playing a Classy Warlock

Great warlocks usually use the following techniques. So if you're playing a character of this class, try to incorporate them into your strategy.

Blast Early and Often

Your *eldritch blast* is your most potent ability, and you can use it as often as you want. Though it requires a standard action and can be used only once per round, you should at least consider using a blast no matter what kind of situation you face.

Think Before Blasting

On the other hand, it's easy to get carried away with *eldritch blasts*. Though you should make as much use of this ability as possible, it isn't the right response to every situation. Your *eldritch blast* is a potent weapon, but it probably won't knock out your foe with one shot. So even when a blast seems like the correct option, make sure that you and your allies can stay in the fight long enough to finish off the foe before acting on that impulse.

Diversify

Your *eldritch blast* gives you decent combat ability, but it also pays to improve your mobility, defenses, and perception, so keep those attributes in mind when you choose your invocations. In addition, your deceive item ability can expand your options considerably, since it allows you to employ all sorts of magic items.

Remember Your Friends

Your *eldritch blast* makes you force to be reckoned with, but don't get cocky or pushy. Instead, learn to work with your allies.

The Party's Front Line: Your party's more heavily armored individuals (particularly fighters and paladins) form a fighting line that keeps enemies away from you. So be ready to support them in case they get into trouble. And while your *eldritch blast* is probably just as potent as any melee attack available to those characters, you must use care when aiming it, so learn to maneuver for a clear shot when blasting into a melee. Consider taking the Precise Shot feat to help you use your *eldritch blasts* against foes in melee with your allies.

Other Spellcasters: You probably aren't the only magic wielder in your party, but you may well have the smallest selection of effects available to you. Try to make your fellow spellcasters aware of what you can do, so that they can select spells to cover the gaps in your capabilities. And even though your powers are primarily offensive in nature, you can't expect other spellcasters to let you have all the fun blasting the opposition. But perhaps you and another spellcaster could work together to smother the opposition with magic. One effective tactic is to allow a spellcasting ally to use area spells while you take out the enemy leaders or pick off cripples with your *eldritch blasts*. So talk to your party's other spellcasters and work out some ways to coordinate your attacks with their spells.

Some Key Equipment

If you're a warlock, your magical abilities are more important to you than your gear. Nevertheless, a few pieces of the right equipment can make your career longer and happier.

- **Armor:** Buy the best light armor you can afford. At the beginning of your career, your finances may limit you to studded leather, but move up to a chain shirt or mithral armor as soon as you can. You can take a feat to gain proficiency with medium or heavy armor, but either of these will slow you down and impose an arcane spell failure chance on your *eldritch blast* and invocation powers.

No matter what kind of armor you choose, you'll never regret spending the money to beef up your Armor Class still more. So add other defensive items, such as *rings of protection* and *amulets of natural armor* when you can afford them. Remember that several lesser items whose benefits stack give you better protection, and at a cheaper price, than one big item.

- **Melee Weapon:** Though your magic is better than your fighting ability, you're no slouch in battle, and you never know when you'll have to resort to hand-to-hand combat. A spear deals good damage and can also prove useful in probing surfaces for unseen dangers. A long spear has reach and can help keep foes a little farther away from you.
- **Ranged Weapon:** Early in your career, a crossbow can prove as effective as an *eldritch blast*. And even after you've gained a few levels, a crossbow is still useful against opponents you cannot affect with your

eldritch blasts. A heavy crossbow deals more damage than a light one but takes longer to reload, so make your choice based on the amount of help you expect from your friends.

- **Diversified Magic:** You'll never run out of *eldritch blasts* and invocations, but the scope of those powers is strictly limited. You'll probably want to take advantage of your deceive item ability to add some variety to your bag of tricks. Scrolls are a cheap and handy way to carry a broad array of magic, but for effects that you use often, consider a wand. When choosing scrolls or other magic items, aim for effects that you can't duplicate with your class abilities, including utilitarian magic such as *knock* and *haste*, defenses such as *shield* and *displacement*, and mobility boosters such as *expeditious retreat* and *gaseous form*. And since your deceive item power allows you to use items of all kinds, you aren't limited to scrolls or wands that store arcane spells. You also can employ useful divine spells such as *shield of faith*, *bless weapon*, *divine favor*, and *magic vestment*. And when you gain the imbue item ability at 12th level, you can make items of all kinds yourself -- if you can spare the time and experience points.
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About the Author

Skip Williams keeps busy with freelance projects for several different game companies, and he served as the sage of *Dragon Magazine* for eighteen years. Skip is a codesigner of the **D&D** 3rd edition game and the chief architect of the *Monster Manual*. When not devising swift and cruel deaths for player characters, Skip putters in his kitchen or garden (rabbits and deer are not Skip's friends) or works on repairing and improving the century-old farmhouse that he shares with his wife, Penny, and a growing menagerie of pets.

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